

Conversations under a Tung Tree

(painted by Ch'iu Ying)

Lord P'ao, prince,
collected bronzes
loved the paintings of Sung
read the Histories
and practiced the Rites.

In spring
he watched the plum trees ripen
on West Farm;
In fall
he checked the rice plants
of the eastern fen

and daily went with friends
to the silver Tung tree
speaking of far off cities
and high officialdom.

"Why not return
to your rightful place
at the Emperor's side?"
friends would ask.

"Each day I practice the Rites
and read the Histories.
I put my estate in order.
I tend to my people.
In the city are a thousand pleasures.
A hundred-thousand men
pursue them.
Their thoughts are like the scraps of quartz carvings.
Their pleasures are the miseries of others.
But here as a farmer
gentleman
scholar
with friends in attendance
and servants at peace
I am whole as the universe."

The Cowherd of Han Kan

Across the whole North Plain nothing moves but dust.
In my years as herder I have watched
the Naymans march to war,
the Turks turn South
dressed in bear's fur.
Now the swirling dust has left them